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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, it's finally happened, summer has arrived. Yes, the hot weather, the evening thunderstorms, and all. We've finally managed to get some nice weather this past week. We managed to get the pool opened, some of the flower gardens put in, and the air conditioners running! It's great. And, if all goes well, by the time you read this issue, I'll have got in my first round of golf of the season! Life is good again.

I don't have much to say this week. Not much time to really even think about some commentary - your lucky break! So, let's get to this week's issue. Enjoy the weather!

Until next time...

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From STReport #642

> The Flip Side STR Feature From a different viewpoint!
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A LITTLE OF THIS, A LITTLE OF THAT

by Michael Lee

Occasionally I'm asked which of the three major on-line services I like best: CIS, Delphi or Genie. To me, that is one of those really difficult questions, on par with "Which do you like best, steak, ice cream or potatoes". All three are foods but there are times when I like each one "best". It's the same with the three major on-line services; each one has a different flavor and texture, and there are times when I think of each one as "best".

CIS is the grandpappy of the on-line services and has several different ST areas. It's the most expensive of the three services but

it offers the same price 7 days a week, 24-hours a day. The other two services charge you "an arm and a leg" if you want to call during prime time (usually 7am to 6pm) but CIS charges the same no matter what time you call. There's usually plenty of sysops and users available to answer any questions that you have.

The ST area on Delphi is probably the smallest of the three major's but it's growing rapidly. Much of that rapid growth is due to the casual atmosphere in the message base; people seem to let down their hair and just chat. Also, the recently implemented 20-20 Plan probably has had a lot to do with it's recent growth. For $20 a month, you can call 20 hours (non-prime time) and you're not limited to just the ST area. All of Delphi is available for that $20.

Last, but certainly not least, is Genie. It's the "newest kid" on the block but in just a few short years, it has grown to be possibly the major on-line service for ST users. Besides the ST Roundtable, there are also 4-5 other individual ST product support Roundtables. Not satisfied with the success they've had, Genie recently came up with Star Services. With Star Services, you pay one small monthly fee (I believe it's $5.00) and your 1200 and 2400 on-line times are only $6.00 per hour (non-prime time). Plus, with Star Services there are many of the Roundtables which are free!! That's right, free!!

This week, Genie added the coup de grace..ST Aladdin!! Written by T. Purves of Griffin Software, ST Aladdin is a front-end program that automates all your GEnie Roundtable and GEmail functions for you. Once you get it setup properly (I'm still working on that) it does everything for you. ST Aladdin log's you onto Genie, captures all the new messages and file listings (from as many Roundtables as you wish), and then logs you off. At your convenience, you can read and reply to the messages and mail, and pick out which files you want to download. It will then go back on-line, send your replies and download the files you want. It does a lot more (I'm still learning) but that gives you the basic idea behind it. It speeds up your on-line time, thus saving you money. ST Aladdin is a very well written program (what else would you expect from Tim) and is heavily documented. The price? Just the cost of downloading it!! That's right, it's another "freebie" from Genie!!

That will give you a brief synopsis of each service. Each one has dedicated sysops who will try to make your time on-line as pleasurable and enjoyable as possible. Each one has interesting message bases. Each one has a good file area (though Genie's seems to be the largest). You will find many of the same users frequent two or more of them, so no matter where you go, you'll find friendly faces. So which one should you join? Do like I did, join all three!!

I just want to thank ICD for an excellent design with the internal Mega HD adaptor/mount. Last Friday, while leaving my office, I managed to DROP my Mega 4 off my desk. As it bounced off my chair on its way down, I stood transfixed and watched until it hit the floor.

I have a carpeted floor so the case wasn't broken but when I picked it up something rattled. I figured the HD mount had let go or the Seagate had broken apart. THAT is one miserable feeling!

Got home suicidal and took the Mega apart. Everything looked OK except

that my T-16 had come out of its socket. Put it back in the socket, booted with trepidation... everything worked fine!

The T-16 was in a bastard socket - I'd used the original socket in my old sold ST. Here's to Atari's designers for coming up with one TOUGH computer, to Jim Allen for solid design of his accelerator, and... particularly to ICD for designing a perfectly-fitting, strong mount for their internal HD kit! Thanks to all for protecting this user from himself.

(From Mike Valent on Genie.)

Until next week....

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and Mother Nature has again proven that she's got a sense of humor. In the space of 24 hours we've gone from October/November-type weather to early August weather. Depending on how the temperature is tomorrow, we may be in the middle of our first heat wave. A heat wave, according to the local TV meteorologist, is three consecutive days with temperatures at or above 90. While temps in the 90's never really bothered me much, having three days of it after about a month of temps in the 50's takes a little bit of adjustment. And I don't seem to adjust like I used to. I turned 45 today. Whoopie! The funny thing is that I don't feel 45. There are times when I feel 15, and there are times when I feel 80.... but never 45. <grin>

Being well into "middle age", I find it strange that I don't feel more grown up. I can remember my parents at my age. They were all grown up and proper and raising a large family.

Like just about everyone else, my parents always seemed 'all growed up' to me, even when they were in their early 30's. And here I am, still basically a big, gray-haired kid. I still horse around with my nieces and nephews and they, too, think of Unka Joe as a big kid. And I'm content with that. On a very basic level, we are what we are, and I'm content to play with my 'toys' and do whatever else comes along.

So let's see what's come along on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Mille Babic posts this about the Scandinavian Atari Computer Show:

The Nordic Atari Computer Show (NAS) 2005

Where? G•…teborgs H•…gre Samskola in Gothenburg
B•-ltgatan 4 (Tram stop "Stampgatan")
When? 2 - 3 July 2005
Saturday, 2 July, 10:00 - 22:00
Sunday, 3 July, 11:00 - 16:00
How to get there?
By car, train or public transport.
See www.vasttrafik.se or www.gulasidorna.se (maps)

What? The main theme for NAS2005 is Accelerated Falcon030 with ct60/63 and EtherNet network card.

Ethernet LAN with access to Internet is available for all who bring their own computers.

Rodolphe Czuba will be attending NAS2005.
Nick Harlow (16/32-Systems) is probably coming.
The brothers Gild• will show the EtherNet network card.
Three Atari-compatible Hades computers will be at NAS.
A number of Atari Falcon030 with both ct60 and Falcon eXtender.
At least two Atari TT030, plus STacy and STF.
ASH-MagiC-PC will be shown with LAN/Internet capability.
64-bit multimedia console Atari Jaguar.
Atari Portfolio.

Entrance fee:

SEK 20 per day to the treasurer Kenneth Medin. (Press free.)
Info: Information posted at http://www.sak.nu/nas Mille Babic’s homepage is during June and July entirely devoted to NAS2005.
http://mille.atari.org

Lodging:

We can recommend a youth hostel in Gothenburg:
Kvibergs Vandrarhem (Tram 6, 10 minutes from NAS) See http://www.vandrarhem.com Hotel F1 is well-known for its fixed price of SEK 310/night for a room, whether for one or three people in the same room.

Perfect for the family. Located in Fr•…lunda, telephone 031-492400.
KFUK-KFUM has a summer hostel right next door to NAS, in the former women’s jail Gullbrohemmet. It is often used by backpackers and others who want somewhere cheap to stay the night in town.

E-mail: info@sak.nu (Swedish Atari Club) atari@sverige.nu (Mille Babic, NAS05 Coordinator)

Telephone:
0762-100934 during NAS days for directions, help, etc.

Once again it is time for The Nordic Atari Show, this annual gathering that rings us together to share experiences, talk, and let software and hardware change owners.

It is now the eleventh year in a row that NAS manifests. We really hope that all expectations will be fulfilled and everyone can express their interest for Atari.

As was the case the previous two years, NAS is again scheduled a weekend in the vacation month of July.

One large room will host any commercial stands, plus demonstrations by programmers and other Atari friends. Many different models of Atari and compatibles will be shown.

The largest room will host lectures and exhibitor demonstrations of applications, system software, games, and hardware solutions.
Other activities will include small competitions of different kinds. It has not yet been determined which, though likely at least one classic game on an Atari will figure in some way.

Refreshments available on site will consist of soda in cans and coffee. The event is located in a school, so everyone is expected to follow the rules of conduct that apply to these premises.

Svenska Atariklubben
In•-gogatan 12 (c/o Medin)
418 74 Gothenburg "
Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HDDriver, posts this:

In the past I have been asked whether users abroad could order HDDRIVER or updates and pay with PayPal (http://www.paypal.com). This is possible now."

Ronald Hall tells Uwe:

"Thats great news Uwe! I’m sure many users (both new and those who wish to update) will appreciate this. Thanks much."

Joseph Place hears about the Nordic Atari Show and asks:

"While drooling over these posts about NAS, I began to wonder if there may be support to have a North American Atari Show? I know there are gaming expos that companies like B&C Computervisions and Best Electronics have supported. How many of you would support an Atari show in the USA? I would be willing to pay $200-300 dollars for registration if we were to fly in a guest like Rodolphe Czuba and have some interesting things to show/discuss/purchase, etc. Chime in!"

Coda tells Joseph:

"Can you make it somewhere in the Metropolitan NY area, around the end of September? If so, I will bring my soldering iron!"

Joseph replies:

"Honestly, I couldn’t afford that much, but I’d be willing to chip in what I could.

I’m all for the idea of a show, and I’d love to go to one and see some of the faces attached to the names!"

’Quincy’ asks for help finding software for a cartridge clock:

"I have a Navarone Timekeeper Cartridge Clock for an Atari 520ST. Unfortunately, the one floppy disk with drivers I have is corrupted. Anyone know if the software is available anywhere on the ’net?"

Greg Goodwin tells Quincy:

"I think I have one of these in storage. Remind me in email and I’ll look for it this weekend."

Jean-Marc Maucotel asks about "language swapping" for MagiC5:

"I have a german version of MagiC 5, got it with my Falcon, can I patch it to have a french version?"

Derryck Croker tells Jean-Marc:

"With a resource editor you could translate all of the RSC files from German, which would give you an interface in your language, but any system error messages produced by the OS would still be in German. Also there might be a flag or two to indicate the OS’s language version. I have English resource files on my web site (DDP section) which may or may not be of some use to you."

On the lighter side, Winnie Oakbob asks about the ST’s interplanetary capability:

"I want to send an ATARI ST to Mars next week and I wonder if it will work there. Do you know if the ST works on Mars?"

Exxos tells Winnie:

"Most of NASA’a stuff don’t seem to. Perhaps that’s where they are going wrong!"

Bill Glaholt tells Exxos:

"Yeah, but inside sources say that most of them have been running on Amiga hardware. (*wink*)"

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Conker' Goes Gold!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Coaster Gets Soaked!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Conker: Live and Reloaded Goes Gold For Xbox

The most popular (and lethal) squirrel in the world, Conker, is readying his plans to invade gamers' homes as Microsoft Game Studios announced that Conker: Live and Reloaded for Xbox has gone gold. Conker: Live and Reloaded, developed by the award-winning team at Rare, will drop gamers on to the front lines of an epic battle between the noble Squirrels and the vicious Tediz.

Gaming's notoriously naughty squirrel - Conker - arrives on Xbox with a bang in an all-new Xbox Live-enabled team-based shooter, Conker: Live & Reloaded. Featuring intense death-match and campaign storyline modes via Xbox Live and system link, players can compete as one of six combat specialists across multi-mission campaigns covering Old War and Future War. The Live game-play promises to deliver the non-stop action, humour, gratuitous violence and intensity for which Conker is famous.

Also included is the critically acclaimed single-player game, Conker's Bad Fur Day, completely recreated for the Xbox with stunning graphics and "reloaded" attitude.

Summertime Gets Soaked! as Atari Prepares for 'RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked!'

The summer solstice just got a little brighter as Atari, Inc. announced that developer Frontier has completed RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked!, the first expansion pack for the successful RollerCoaster Tycoon 3 franchise. Scheduled to ship to retail outlets nationwide on the longest day of summer, June 21, RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked! is perfectly timed because the game invites players to create and control their own water parks just as the summer vacation season gets underway.

According to the NPD Group, RollerCoaster Tycoon is the top-selling tycoon franchise, having sold nearly nine million units life-to-date worldwide, and since 1995, becoming the second best selling PC game of all time in the U.S. "With Frontier's creativity and passion, Atari is pleased to continue to support the enormous worldwide RCT fan base with innovative and exciting

new content," said Matt Collins, Director of Category Marketing at Atari. "With RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked! Frontier and Atari have created so much more than just an expansion pack."

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked! offers players more than 50 new rides and coasters, many of which are built around a water park theme, including swimming pool complexes, massive water slides, wave pools and amazing interactivity with water, including stirring up swimming pools, firing water cannons at park guests and a brand new interactive water-based coaster called The Roller Soaker! New Swimming Pool and Waterfall Designers will enable players to add hundreds of enhancements and the RCT3 MixMaster has been expanded to allow players to customize dazzling laser light, firework and water shows using the player's own music library.

Players can also create marine spectaculars with performing dolphins, killer whale shows and custom-designed aquariums. The new tunneling system opens up a whole new set of opportunities, with tunnels both underground and under water. With original coasters, water slides, beaches and more, RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked! is the ultimate interactive experience for summer fun.

Developed by Frontier Developments Ltd. of Cambridge, England, in conjunction with Chris Sawyer, the creator and developer of RollerCoaster Tycoon, RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked! is for the PC and will ship to retailers on June 21 for $29.99.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Apple to Switch Macs to Intel Chips

After years of touting its Macintosh computers as superior alternatives, Apple Computer Inc. said Monday that it would switch to the very Intel microprocessors that power machines designed to run Microsoft Windows.

Though the long-rumored transition will help the Mac compete against Windows PCs in performance and - potentially - price, the move poses big challenges for Apple, its software developers and users. In fact, past Mac chip changes have led to significant market share losses.

Apple now must persuade current users and potential buyers that today's Macs will not become the technology equivalent of lame ducks. And it must get software companies to develop programs that work on both the Macs of today and of tomorrow.

In a speech to software developers Monday, Apple CEO Steve Jobs admitted the change will not be fast or easy. The first Intel-based Macs won't appear until June 2006, and the full product line won't shift to Intel until the following year, he said.

"This is not going to be a transition that happens overnight," Jobs said. "It’s going to happen over a period of a few years."

Jobs also announced the immediate availability of a "transition kit" for programmers and said Apple would offer software that translates programs written specifically for the older chips to run on Macs with Intel inside.

Jobs revealed that Apple has been working on the move for at least five years, creating two separate versions of its critically acclaimed Mac OS X operating system for both the current Mac chips and those built by Intel.

"Mac OS X has been leading a secret double life," he said.

Two major Mac software makers - Adobe Systems Inc. and Microsoft Corp. - announced that they would support Macs running the new hardware. Roz Ho, general manager of Microsoft’s Macintosh Business Unit, said its Office productivity suite would work on current and future Macs.

But the announcement did not address how Apple would keep Mac OS X from running on non-Apple computers. The appearance of cheaper clones could hurt Apple sales.

It’s also not clear whether the move might make Macs more vulnerable to attacks by viruses and other malware. To date, they’ve been mostly exempt.

In making the move, Apple is abandoning a processor known as the PowerPC that it developed with International Business Machines Corp. and Motorola Inc. in the 1990s to compete against Intel’s x86 architecture and which it touted as more powerful.

On Monday, Apple did not specify the exact Intel chips it plans to use. Jobs did say that Intel’s focus on power management, crucial to extending battery life on portable computers, was as important as performance in the decision.

The switch ends years of squabbling between Apple and its chip suppliers, IBM and Freescale Semiconductor Inc., which was spun off from Motorola last year.

When Motorola was the primary supplier of G4 chips for Macs, Apple grew frustrated with the rate of improvement. In 2002, it signed a deal with IBM to provide advanced chips for its high-end desktop computers, the Power Mac G5.

But the IBM-Apple deal was rocky almost from the start.

Jobs said Macs would top 3 gigahertz in processing speed by the end of last year, but IBM could not deliver. The IBM chips also were scarce for desktop computers and nonexistent for notebooks, which by some measures have now begun to outsell PCs in the United States.

They simply ran too hot and consumed too much electricity for portables.

Analysts were skeptical about the Apple announcement.

In the past, major transitions have led to defections by customers and software developers, said Nathan Brookwood, an analyst at the research firm Insight 64.

In the mid-1980s, the Mac captured as much as 10 percent of the overall PC

market, he said. But when Apple switched from Motorola 68000 processors to PowerPC chips, the Mac’s share dropped to below 5 percent. When the Mac’s operating system later changed to OS X, it fell to below 3 percent.

"I have a lot of trouble understanding why they would do it," Brookwood said of the transition to Intel processors. "Unless there’s something magical, I would have to believe it’s not a good move."

By wrestling away Apple’s business from IBM, Intel gains further dominance of the PC processor business. It currently has 80 percent market share.

Paul Otellini, Intel’s new chief executive, said the chip maker was pleased to have Apple’s business.

"I suspect there is a whole bunch of you that never thought you would see this logo on this stage," he said onstage with Jobs. "I was one of them for a while."

Although IBM and Freescale suffer a setback with the loss of Apple, Mac chip sales were just a fraction of their total semiconductor revenues.

Recently, IBM has signed deals to provide the chips for the next-generation video game machines of Microsoft, Nintendo Co. and Sony Corp.

A new microprocessor that IBM co-developed with Sony and Toshiba Corp., code-named Cell and planned for Sony’s next PlayStation console, is being touted as capable of delivering 10 times the performance of today’s PC processors.

In a memo to employees, Freescale CEO Michel Mayer said Apple’s business represents only 3 percent of the company’s revenues.

"It is increasingly clear that the center of technology innovation is moving away from the personal computer," Mayer said. "The phase-out of this business now gives us the opportunity to focus more on the higher growth segments of the semiconductor market where our portfolio is a good fit."

AOL Offers Free, Web-Based E-Mail

America Online Inc. launched a free, Web-based e-mail service on Monday, departing for the first time from a fee-based subscription model as it moves to compete with free, and increasingly large, e-mail accounts offered by the likes of Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc.

The unit of media conglomerate Time Warner Inc. said the service will provide users with two gigabytes of storage, along with protection against viruses and spam. The mail program is being marketed as an extension of the company’s popular chat application, AOL Instant Messenger, and users of that program will be able to use their existing screen name for their e-mail address, the company said.

Google’s Gmail service currently gives users about 2.3 gigabytes of storage and is gradually raising that ceiling. Yahoo offers 1 gigabyte for free and Microsoft Corp.’s Hotmail allows 250 megabytes.

The company also upped its offerings for paying subscribers to its traditional America Online e-mail, giving its nearly 80 million accounts

unlimited storage space. AOL said it is the first online service to offer unlimited e-mail storage.

The company also said it will allow multiple simultaneous log-ins for dial-up connections, an offering previously reserved for high-speed connections. The change allows members with different screen names, but on the same account, to log in at the same time from multiple locations.

Seagate Boosts Notebook Storage

Seagate Technology will start a shipping 2.5-inch notebook PC drive with 160GB of capacity in the first quarter of next year, it said this week.

The drive was one of a series of new products - including new 500GB drives - that the company announced at a news conference in Tokyo.

The extra storage for the 160GB drive is achieved through a new technology called perpendicular recording, according to Tsuyoshi Kobayashi, vice president and regional director of Nippon Seagate.

Perpendicular technology is being introduced by most of the world's major hard drive vendors and promises a series of big capacity boosts in the coming years for drives used in servers, PCs, notebooks, and portable devices, the vendors say.

It works by standing the magnetic fields that represent data bits upright. In today's commercially available drives, those fields lay flat on the disk surface. Standing them upright means they take less space, enabling more to be packed on the disk.

Seagate's drive looks to be the first 2.5-inch drive with this capacity using perpendicular recording technology to hit the market. For notebooks, two companies have so far said they plan to use the technology with 2.5-inch drives. Hitachi Global Storage Technologies is field-testing 100GB drives, but has yet to announce it is shipping them. In April, Fujitsu said it planned to sell 200GB drives using perpendicular technology, but not until 2007.

Seagate's Momentus 5400.3 160GB drive will have a spin speed of 5400 rpm and come with either the Ultra ATA-100 interface or SATA (Serial ATA) 150 interface, according to the company.

The company will use the technology to boost the capacity of a range of its 2.5-inch drives, Kobayashi says.

One will be a 7200 rpm version due next year, although the company did not specify the capacity. Others will have capacities as high as 240GB and be available within a few years, Kobayashi says.

Seagate is also considering adopting perpendicular recording technology for both its 3.5-inch and 1-inch drives, but the company isn't saying exactly what it's planning yet, he says.

"There's no boundary. Perpendicular can be used in drives regardless of the form factor," Kobayashi says.

As well as the push into perpendicular technology, Seagate is also

increasing the capacity options for many of its upcoming drives using conventional storage technology. Many of these are aimed at consumer applications, he says.

At the high capacity end, the company will start shipping three new 3.5-inch 500GB drives in the next six months, it says.

The 500GB Barracuda 7200.9, as with prior products in the range, is aimed at high-end PCs. The company is also introducing a new line of products called the DB35 series for video recorders and home servers. Capacities in the range start at 80GB and top out with the 500GB version. The third 500GB product is an external drive, the company says.

The new Barracuda and the DB35 series will ship in the July-September quarter, while the external drive will ship in the October-December period, Seagate says.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the company is also offering new 1-inch drives and, for the first time, will sell its own brand of Compact Flash (CF) card form-factor drives, it says.

The ST1 series for MP3 players and other portable devices comes in 4GB and 8GB versions. The company put its first CF form-factor drives on sale earlier this year with capacities of 2.5GB and 5GB and these were sold to electronics makers. The new CF drives, aimed at photographers, will come in 4GB and 8GB capacities, Kobayashi says.

Both the ST1 and the CF drives will ship in the July-September period, the company says.

Yahoo Ditches Fees On U.S. Web Auctions

Internet media company Yahoo Inc. will quit charging fees for auctions on its U.S. site in an effort to encourage more people to sell their wares, the company said on Sunday.

Rob Solomon, general manager and vice president of Yahoo Shopping, denied the move was a defensive response to top online auctioneer eBay Inc.’s announcement on Wednesday it had agreed to buy Shopping.com, a provider of online comparison shopping and consumer reviews, for $620 million.

"It’s taken us six months for us to work on this. The timing of this (and eBay’s acquisition announcement) is purely coincidental," he said.

Yahoo has no plans to end the fees it charges users on its other auction sites, including the one for Japan, the company’s top auction site. The company also runs auction sites in Canada, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Yahoo said it will generate revenue from its U.S. auctions by continuing to have paid search listings by its Yahoo Search Marketing division. Paid search ads are triggered by keywords related to their product or brand.

Previously, Sunnyvale, California-based Yahoo has charged users of its U.S. auction site 5 cents to 75 cents to post an item, depending on the starting price of the item.

If an item sells, the user then has had to pay a 2 percent final value fee

that can vary depending on the closing price of the item sold. More expensive items carried additional fees that could total up to 1.5 percent of the final price of the item in addition to the 2 percent fee.

Microsoft to Ship Modified Windows XP

Microsoft will begin distributing a modified version of its Windows XP operating system to PC makers in Europe on June 15, more than a year after it was ordered to do so as part of the European Commission’s antitrust ruling against the company.

Microsoft was ordered last March to sell a version of Windows XP without its media player software, as part of the Commission’s ruling that the software maker abused its "near-monopoly" in Europe to harm competition. By effectively forcing PC makers to include Windows Media Player with every computer they sold, Microsoft gained an unfair advantage over rivals such as RealNetworks and Apple Computer, the Commission said. The Commission is the E.U.’s executive body.

The new software, called Windows XP Home Edition N and Windows XP Professional Edition N, is Microsoft’s second attempt to meet the Commission’s requirement. It distributed a version of XP to channel partners in January, but the Commission rejected that product as unsatisfactory.

In particular, Microsoft altered registry files in a way that made the operating system work less well with rival media players, the Commission said at the time. It also rejected Microsoft’s proposed name for the product, Windows XP Reduced Media Edition, which it found unappealing. The Commission told Microsoft to remove warnings that the new software would not work with some programs.

The latest versions fix those problems, Microsoft says in a statement Wednesday. They will be available to PC makers on June 15 in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and to other distribution channels, including retail stores, on July 1. Versions in 10 other European languages will be in the channel by July 15, it says.

Microsoft has said the software will cost the same as the "standard" version of Windows XP, which Microsoft will continue to sell. Critics have argued that it should charge less for the versions without Windows Media Player, on the grounds that consumers will not pay the same price for less software, undermining the ruling.

As with existing versions of Windows, PC makers and end users can install other media players with the new editions, Microsoft says. It provided CDs of the software to the European Commission early last week, it says.

How much impact the new software will have remains unclear. Most big PC makers in Europe said in January that they did not plan to offer the version of Windows without media player, citing the cost of supporting additional products and the weak demand they anticipated from consumers.

A Microsoft spokesman in Europe did not immediately return a call seeking comment Wednesday.

In the ruling last March, the Redmond, Washington, company was also fined

$662 million and ordered to provide interfaces for its workgroup server software to competitors. The company has been haggling with regulators over the terms of its compliance ever since, and the Commission has threatened to fine Microsoft $5 million a day for noncompliance.

The two sides appear to be inching closer to an accord, however. A week ago, Microsoft submitted a new proposal for compliance that included more flexible terms for its server licensing program. The Commission said it will consult competitors to decide if the efforts are acceptable.

Hotbar in Hot Water with Online Privacy Group

Adware vendor Hotbar.com Inc. is feeling the heat this week over its pesky adware programs and spotty adherence to online privacy rules, eWEEK has learned.

Last week, TRUSTe, the online privacy group, revoked Hotbar.com's right to display that organization's seal of approval. On Tuesday, anti-virus giant Symantec Corp. joined the fray, asking the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California to rule on its right to detect and remove certain Hotbar programs as unwanted adware.

Hotbar.com distributes a variety of adware, which tracks users' online behavior in exchange for such digital gewgaws as Web browser toolbars with changeable "skins," screensaver programs and instant messaging emoticons.

The company has been criticized by anti-spyware researchers in the past for dubious installation practices, such as using spam e-mail or pop-up advertisements to push packages of its adware applications onto users' systems, often with scant notice to users about what is being installed.

Hotbar.com fiercely defends its business practices, and sent a cease-and-desist letter to Sunbelt Software Inc., an anti-spyware software vendor, in May, calling on that company to stop labeling its wares "adware," according to a copy of the letter posted on Sunbelt's Web site.

In the letter, Hotbar claims that its adware provides a valuable service to Web surfers, users of Microsoft's Outlook program and online shoppers. Moreover, the company alleges that competing anti-spyware programs by Microsoft Corp., Lavasoft Inc., McAfee Inc. and others don't flag Hotbar's programs.

The Symantec lawsuit may be an effort to avoid Sunbelt's fate. Symantec is not seeking damages, "but simply a ruling from the court that we have a right to detect such programs," spokesperson Genevieve Haldeman told eWEEK in an e-mail message.

While it fights Sunbelt and Symantec in court over the definition of "adware," Hotbar also found itself on the defensive with online privacy group TRUSTe over the improper display of the TRUSTe program seal on Hotbar's Web page.

Like other companies, Hotbar displays the TRUSTe logo on its Web page, indicating it adheres to that group's privacy guidelines. But TRUSTe now claims that Hotbar violated its guidelines by displaying the TRUSTe logo on a page that downloads software onto visitors' computers.

TRUSTe forbade that practice after the organization’s members became concerned that displaying the TRUSTe seal on software download pages would be perceived as an endorsement of the software being downloaded-a service that TRUSTe does not provide, according to executive director Fran Meier, executive director at TRUSTe.

TRUSTe informed Hotbar.com recently that its status had been changed to "not verified" pending changes in the Web page regarding the display of the TRUSTe Seal.

Hotbar has since removed the seal from its download page but still displays it on its home page, a violation of TRUSTe’s rules, Meier said.

Clicking on the TRUSTe seal displays a page indicating that Hotbar is not verified and its display of the seal is "unlawful and violates a TRUSTe trademark."

Meier said that TRUSTe periodically reviews the sites of organizations that display its seal and acts quickly to revoke certification from companies that violate its guidelines.

However, Meier admits that her group does not evaluate downloads from Web sites. Sites like Hotbar could technically comply with TRUSTe’s online privacy guidelines and still distribute adware and spyware programs.

TRUSTe is strategically exploring the possibility of looking at software downloads in addition to how Web sites handle sensitive information provided by Web surfers.

Behind the legal wrangling is mounting criticism as many ordinary computer users struggle to free their computers from serial adware and spyware infections.

A number of anti-spyware bills are competing on Capitol Hill, and experts say that Congress is likely to pass some kind of legislation outlawing certain installation and user monitoring practices later this year.

More recently, a group of anti-spyware vendors joined forces with the Center for Democracy and Technology and other public interest groups to form the Anti-Spyware Coalition, which will develop industry standard definitions of such terms as "adware" and "spyware," which are often conflated.

Do Google Ads Help Fund Spyware?

Google’s sponsored-link ads may have helped turn the world’s best-known search engine into a financial powerhouse, but they also are coming under attack for contributing to spyware practices that undermine trust on the Web.

Anti-spyware researcher Ben Edelman this week criticized Google Inc. for playing a role in the distribution of browser toolbars that he says violates Google’s own principle about software downloads.

In a research report released Monday, Edelman outlined examples of how Google’s AdWords pay-per-click ads are helping to fund software download practices in which spyware is installed on users’ machines or where

disclosures and software licenses are hidden.

He specifically cited the role that Google ads play with the IBIS WebSearch Toolbar, a download labeled as spyware by anti-spyware tools, and with search toolbars from Ask Jeeves Inc., one of Google's major ad-distribution partners. Google shares a portion of ad revenue with its distribution partners.

"Users have more and more of this junk trying to sneak onto their computers, and it's a profitable business for the makers of the software because they can show these ads," Edelman said.

With the IBIS WebSearch Toolbar, Edelman examined the ads that appear when a user enters a search query in the toolbar. The search results page, on WebSearch.com, includes sponsored listings.

In some cases, Edelman traced those listings back to the Google.com domain, but they traveled through a middleman that he identified as Go2Net. Go2Net is a property of InfoSpace Inc., which is also a distribution partner for Google's search-based ads. Google does not appear to have a direct relationship with IBIS WebSearch.

InfoSpace officials were unavailable for comment on Edelman's findings, and inquiries to IBIS LLC, the Boca Raton, Fla., company behind WebSearch, were not returned. A Google spokesperson declined to discuss specific ad-distribution partners but said that the company takes its software principles seriously.

"Google strongly supports the adherence to our software principles by our partner network," the spokesperson said in a statement. "Google reviews claims of non-adherence to our software principles and works with our partners to make changes, if necessary, to be in compliance with our principles."

In the software principles, which Google publicly posted about a year ago, the company frowns upon spyware and software installations that trick users or obscure disclosure. Mountain View, Calif.-based Google states that it follows the principles for all its software and encourages partners to follow suit.

Ask Jeeves already had faced past criticism from Edelman and other anti-spyware advocates about the way its search toolbars are distributed. Google regularly names Ask Jeeves as one of its largest distribution partners for AdWords, and search queries on the toolbars return results that include Google's sponsored links.

Along with its namesake toolbar, the Oakland, Calif., search company also supports toolbars for sites that it had acquired with its purchase of Interactive Search Holdings Inc. Those include the My Search and My Way toolbars.

While none of the toolbars track users like spyware, Edelman said that some of the Ask Jeeves partners distributing them use download tactics that are similar to spyware purveyors.

"Ask Jeeves is not spying but is using lousy installation tactics," he said.

In one case, an Ask Jeeves toolbar is bundled with a peer-to-peer program called iMesh, but users are only informed of the toolbar download in fine

print on page 27 of a 56-page license, Edelman wrote in his report.

In the past, the MySearch toolbar also has been included as part of the Kazaa peer-to-peer installation. While it is disclosed during installation, the toolbar’s licensing terms are hidden, Edelman said.

Ask Jeeves is aware of Edelman’s findings and has begun taking action with its partners. The company is working with iMesh to improve the processes it uses for disclosing information about the toolbar download, said Colby Zintl, an Ask Jeeves spokesperson.

"This is a larger industry issue about the need to improve the disclosure and installation practices," Zintl said. "It’s our responsibility, ultimately, to make sure that partners comply with our policies."

The company previously had severed ties with an unnamed partner that had distributed an Ask Jeeves toolbar download called SmileyCentral through banner ads, Zintl said. Edelman also had criticized Ask Jeeves for promoting SmileyCentral through banner ads that hide links to software licenses.

To Edelman, the larger problem with both the IBIS and Ask Jeeves toolbar examples is that Google’s ads help to fund practices that undermine Google’s own best practices. Google’s advertisers also are often unaware that their ads may appear on sites that are distributing spyware or using questionable practices.

"Google’s advertisers are really being led astray here by Google saying, ’We will show ads on high-quality partner sites and you can trust us,’" Edelman said. "Google is showing these ads any way that they can make a buck."

Google isn’t the only provider of search-based ads to face criticism surrounding spyware and adware.

Yahoo Inc. has a partnership with Claria Corp. to distribute Yahoo’s sponsored-link ads. Claria is well-known for displaying ads through software labeled as adware. Last year, Yahoo faced accusations of favoring adware in its own Anti-Spy spyware-blocking tool before changing default settings in Anti-Spy.

Dave Methvin, the chief technology officer at PC Pitstop LLC, also has observed examples of Google’s sponsored listings appearing in places that violate Google’s terms with publishers and its principles. He wants the search company to do more to tackle the problem, including demonstrating publicly that it is enforcing its policies.

PC Pitstop, a Dakota Dunes, S.D., company that runs a Web site for PC diagnostics, runs ads through Google AdWords and displays sponsored listings on its site, Methvin said.

"If the only penalty for being caught is a ’tsk, tsk,’ then they will just change their name and the next month will be doing the same thing," Methvin said of spyware and adware purveyors.

Methvin acknowledged that Google would be hard-pressed to catch all examples of misused ads but said that the company could make it easier for its publisher partners and users to report questionable use of Google ads.

"Though Google puts on a brave face, to a great extent it’s almost

impossible to stop this fraud," he said.

Trojan Hides in Jackson Suicide Spam

A spam campaign claiming that Michael Jackson has attempted suicide has been spreading across the Internet, according to security firm Sophos.

E-mails with the bogus news contain a Trojan horse that infects a system if a user clicks on a link to find out more about the singer’s alleged self-induced death.

Sophos has identified hundreds of the messages, which draw on the intense interest surrounding the pop star’s recent trial and impending jury verdict.

The spam messages arrive with the subject line, "Re: Suicidal aattempt" and follow with message text noting that Michael Jackson made a "suicidal attempt" at his Neverland Ranch the previous evening.

The rest of the grammatically mangled and often misspelled text reads: "They suggest this attempt follows the last claim was made against the king of pop. 46 years old Michael has left pre-suicid note which describes and interpretes some of his sins."

A link to "read more" takes users to a Web site with a message that it is too busy, but is covertly installing malicious code onto their PCs.

Sophos has determined that the code downloaded onto PCs actually attempts to download another Trojan horse, identified as Troj/Borobt-Gen.

The firm recommends that companies update their corporate virus protection and filter attachments that might contain malicious code if they have not done so already.

Virus-laden messages that are tied into breaking news are being used more often, said Sophos senior technology consultant Graham Cluley.

Many Internet users have become familiar with the more classic types of spam messages, usually advertising prescription medicine or X-rated images, leaving virus writers to exploit new avenues.

"Basically, they’ll try anything that they think will work," said Cluley. "That used to be alerts from banks and credit card companies, but people have been educated about those."

News items, especially involving celebrities, seems to be the next new wave. "People swap these kind of news stories by e-mail all the time," Cluely noted. "So getting one more won’t seem unusual to them, even if it’s from an unknown source."

China Orders All Web Sites to Register

Authorities have ordered all China-based Web sites and blogs to register or be closed down, in the latest effort by the communist government to police

the world of cyberspace.

Commercial publishers and advertisers can face fines of up to 1 million yuan ($120,000) for failing to register, according to documents posted on the Web site of the Ministry of Information Industry.

Private, noncommercial bloggers or Web sites must register the complete identity of the person responsible for the site, it said. The ministry, which has set a June 30 deadline for compliance, said 74 percent of all sites had already registered.

"The Internet has profited many people but it also has brought many problems, such as sex, violence and feudal superstitions and other harmful information that has seriously poisoned people's spirits," the MII Web site said in explaining the rules, which were quietly introduced in March.

All public media in China is controlled by the state, though limits on the Internet have tended to lag behind as advances in technology and the Web's rapid spread outstripped Beijing's ability to keep tabs on users and service providers.

China has more than 87 million Internet users, the world's second largest online population after the United States.

The government has long required all major commercial Web sites to register and take responsibility for Internet content - at least 54 people have been jailed for posting essays or other content deemed subversive online.

But blogs, online diaries, muckraking Web sites and dissident publishing have been harder to police. According to cnblog.org, a Chinese Web log host company, the country has about 700,000 such sites.

Now, however, the government has developed a new system to track down and close those caught violating the rules, the ministry said.

"There's a 'Net Crawler System' that will monitor the sites in real time and search each Web address for its registration number," said one document listing questions and answers about the new rules. "It will report back to the MII if it finds a site thought to be unregistered."

The press advocacy group Reporters Without Borders protested the new rules, saying they would force people with dissenting opinions to shift Web sites overseas, where mainland Chinese users might be unable to access them due to government censorship filters.

The Paris-based group said that in May, many bloggers in China received e-mail messages telling them to register to avoid having their blogs declared illegal.

"Those who continue to publish under their real names on sites hosted in China will either have to avoid political subjects or just relay the Communist Party's propaganda," the rights group said. "This decision will enable those in power to control online news and information much more effectively."

The latest restrictions follow many others. Authorities have closed down thousands of Internet cafes - the main entry to the Web for many Chinese unable to afford a computer or Internet access.

They've also installed surveillance cameras and begun requiring visitors

to Shanghai Internet cafes to register using their official identity cards - all in an effort to keep tabs on who’s seeing and saying what online.

Groups Sue to Overturn Utah’s Porn Law

Civil liberties, publishing and other groups filed a federal challenge Thursday to a Utah law that requires Internet service providers to give customers software filters for blocking pornographic Web sites.

Their lawsuit claims that many Web sites deemed harmful to minors share the same computer servers and Internet addresses as unrelated sites that contain no pornography, and blocking one site can block them all.

Lawyers say Utah’s statute is worse than some laws already struck down in other states because it provides no way for Web sites to appeal judgments made by Utah’s attorney general office about what constitutes a pornographic site.

Under the law signed by Gov. Jon Huntsman in March, state lawyers planned to begin trolling the Internet July 1 for ever-changing Web sites considered pornographic and issuing ISPs blacklists they must incorporate in software filters for customers.

Betsy Burton, owner of The King’s English Bookshop and one of the 14 plaintiffs, said such a list could include her Web site because it links to descriptions and jacket art for books like Margaret Atwood’s "Oryx and Crake," whose cover depicts female bodies in the nude.

Also joining the lawsuit were another bookstore; Utah chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union and the Sexual Health Network; the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund and two small ISPs operating in Utah, Mountain Wireless and CSolutions Inc.

Federal courts have struck down Internet porn-blocking laws in Arizona, New Mexico, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin, said Michael Bamberger, a New York lawyer representing some of the plaintiffs. Congressional efforts also have been overturned.

Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff’s office had no immediate response to the 55-page lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Salt Lake City.

"We have just received it. We’re going to review it and will be meeting with the people who filed the lawsuit," Shurtleff spokesman Paul Murphy said Thursday.

The law’s chief sponsors in the Legislature did not return calls for comment.

Pete Ashdown of XMission, an Internet Service provider with more than 25,000 Utah subscribers, said he had lobbied against the law but didn’t join the lawsuit because "I didn’t want to antagonize anyone further."

Ashdown, a Democrat who plans to challenge U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, next year, said parents can already buy filters to keep their children from viewing porn sites. XMission provides one on request and can reconfigure it to let through sites blocked by mistake. The Utah law would give XMission no such flexibility, he said.

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